

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 17, 2016

Agenda Item: Bighorn Sheep Transfer (From HD 482, Missouri Breaks to the south of the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area) (R4)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 Min

Background

Trapping and moving bighorn sheep is often used to both reduce numbers for population control and to reintroduce new populations or augment existing ones. Such projects require F&W Commission endorsement, and monies are available from auction licenses. The potential trap and move outlined below is presented for endorsement by the Commission. These management actions and associated process are consistent with the Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy.

FWP proposes to trap 30-45 bighorn sheep from the Missouri Breaks in HD 482 and move them to the Sheep Creek/Beartooth WMA area in HD 455. There are two proposed release sites: Sheep Creek, where 21 bighorns from HD 482 were released in December 2014, and the Beartooth WMA. All animals would get a general health assessment and be sampled for a more intensive health and disease profile. This is primarily to reduce numbers in HD 482, which is over population objective and at risk of a density-related disease outbreak. The objective for HD 482 is 292-358, and in July 417 were counted. Although we have increased ewe licenses it has not resulted in enough harvest to effectively reduce the population. Access to the areas where we want to reduce sheep numbers is often difficult, and hunters are generally less motivated to harvest a ewe than they are for a ram. There is always a risk of moving disease along with the sheep, but options are limited.

Public Involvement Process & Results

This is an endorsement request, and if approved requires no extended public comment period, but public comment will be accepted at the meeting.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends moving bighorn sheep from the Missouri Breaks in HD 482 to the Sheep Creek/Beartooth WMA area in HD 455.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse moving bighorn sheep from the Missouri Breaks in HD 482 to the Sheep Creek/Beartooth WMA area in HD 455.